

House Appropriations Committee

Public Testimony on HB203
January 22, 2013

Chairman Ankney and members of the Committee;

For the record, my name is Judy Hart (H A R T) and I am the Chair of the Government Affairs Committee for the Montana Library Association. The purpose of the Association is to promote library interest and development and to raise the standards of library services in the state of Montana.

If we were able to skype in our members today, we would certainly have a full to overflowing house. Although our Montana librarians would be here in full force today, they are hard at work in their communities providing essential library services to their citizens. I am honored to speak on their behalf today and will share with you, in their own words, the direct and positive impact these additional funds would have on their communities.

- In FY 2011, over 4.5 million (4,599,660) people visited public libraries in Montana; Over 7.5 million (7,519,019), items circulated, an increase of almost 12% over 6,752,199 in FY 2010.
- Although direct state aid for public libraries was enacted in 1989, it was not actually funded until 1999. Since the FY2000-2001 biennium, funding for state aid grants has declined from \$125,569 annually to just \$102,830 shared among 82 public libraries. In other words, state aid per capita funding is just **under** 10 cents. Not only has the overall amount of funding declined, its buying power has also declined. According to the US Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the current buying power of \$102,000 is \$76,000 in 2000 dollars. In other words, the buying power of state aid grants to libraries has decreased by almost \$50,000 or 60% in the last decade.
- As we continue to struggle to recover from the economic downturn, Montanans, now more than ever, rely on services offered through their state and local libraries. Libraries have become community anchors, providing access to programming, educational opportunities, print and electronic materials, and technology resources. Fewer dollars both at the local and state level for libraries in times when the public wants and needs more, not less, has a direct impact on library services.
- As noted, all state aid funds simply pass through the State Library budget and are forwarded directly to your local libraries. The per capita, per square mile funding is the **only source of state aid** that local libraries can use to address the **specific and unique needs** of their community.
- How would additional state aid funds impact our Montana libraries and in turn, all residents in Montana? We asked our libraries what this increase in state aid would mean to them and what critical needs these funds will fill in their communities. I will share a few with you. Included in your packet of information is a compilation.

- The Joliet Public Library is situated in a small rural community and has seen an incredible increase in patrons and usage over the past 5 years. JPL would update & streamline its website to better allow our rural patrons to better access our collection via the internet to reserve, renew & place holds on library materials. Add additional staffing to assist with our ever-increasing after school student book clubs. Extend library hours during the summer months.
- From Havre-Hill County Library: Book budgets have decreased over the past years and book prices continue to increase so our buying power is decreasing. We constantly struggle to maintain a diverse collection to meet our patron needs. The additional funds would benefit the Library by being able to purchase books, DVDs, etc. to expand and update our collections; replace, repair and update our computers for public access; purchase a higher speed internet connection to be more user friendly for patrons and staff and to increase efficiency of time; purchase newer technology such as Kindle, Nook, iPad, etc. to stay current with technology to better serve our patrons & train staff to utilize this technology and assist patrons in the use of the technology.
- Basically for Ronan City Library, it will help keep our doors open. Our budget has been cut so much over the years that we are on the verge of closing if our Library District endeavor does not work out. More state aid would ease the burden of fundraising to keep our doors open. If the District does pass, this money could supplement our materials budget, help with children's programming, allow us to offer more adult programming, the possibilities are endless, but it would definitely help improve our services to our community.
- The Darby Community Public Library relies on governmental revenues, grants, private donations and contributions to continue our service to the community. This increase in state aid supplies a crucial need for our library as we struggle to continue community services at the present level. We currently receive only 70 % of our revenue from governmental sources. With a yearly operating budget of less than \$100,000 and a staff of two FTE, we persistently struggle to provide access, materials, information, and educational programs for a population of 4000 residents.
- The Prairie County Library would like to use our funds for postage for ILL since those continue to be an important service to our library patrons. We would like to see some funding for a courier service if it could be better utilized in Eastern Montana. We would also like to see more content added to MontanaLibrary2Go. Our patrons are just now discovering this service and they are extremely excited to use it. As with any small library in Montana, even small amounts of funding have huge rewards in our small communities.
- Here in Hot Springs we would like to use the additional funds for Montana Library-2-Go - a service we are currently not able to utilize due to insufficient funding. That being said - I would have to clarify that we would only use the additional funds if we were open! Our budget is so tight that the reality of possibly having to close our doors is always in the back of our minds. Last year we operated 5 days a week on just under \$30,000.
- Stillwater County - We could probably use the money to join Partners for the Montana Shared Catalog (pending Board approval, of course), and we are currently having to drop our subscription

to the Wall Street Journal because of expense. This would allow us to continue to offer a national newspaper to our patrons.

- Wedsworth Memorial Library in Cascade: The Children's books and the Juvenile sections are the largest needs we have. These areas need to be updated extensively. Teaching a child to become interested in reading at this age is vital for future success.

If we're serious about the development and growth of our youngest citizens, if we're serious about education, if we're serious about supporting life-long learning in Montana, and serious about leveling the playing field so that everyone has a chance to succeed, then we need to continue to be serious about library services.

This means new money for a long overdue increase in Per Capita/Per Square Mile State Aid.

On behalf of the Montana Library Association, I urge you to vote "do pass" on HB203. With the Chair's permission, I submit my testimony for the record.

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